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Uncles *Ex Machina*:
Familial Epiphany in Euripides' *Electra*

Rosa Andújar

At the close of Euripides's *Electra*, the Dioscuri suddenly appear 'on high' to their distraught niece and nephew, who have just killed their mother, the divine twins' mortal sister. This is in fact the second longest extant *deus ex machina* (after the final scene in *Hippolytus*), and the only scene in which a tragedian attempts to resolve directly the aftermath of the matricide. In this article, I argue that Castor and Polydeuces' sudden apparition to Orestes and Electra constitutes a specialized point of intersection between the mortal and immortal realms in Greek tragedy: familial epiphany; that is, an appearance by a god who has an especially intimate relationship with those on stage. Euripides' focus on the familial divine as a category accentuates various contradictions inherent to both ancient Greek theology and dramaturgy. The Dioscuri are a living paradox, ambiguously traversing the space between dead heroes and gods, managing at the same time to occupy both. They oscillate uniquely between the mortal and immortal worlds, as different sources assign different fathers to each brother, and others speak of each one possessing divinity on alternate days. As I propose, the epiphany of these ambiguous brothers crystallizes the problem of the gods' physical presence in drama. Tragedy is the arena in which gods burst suddenly into the mortal realm, decisively and irrevocably altering human action. The physical divine thus tends to be both marginal and directorial, tasked with reining in the plot or directing its future course. The appearance of the familial divine, on the other hand, can in fact obscure the resolution and future direction of a play, undermining the authority of the tragic gods. In the specific case of *Electra*, I contend that the involvement of the Dioscuri, who are Electra and

Orestes' maternal uncles, produces a sense of claustrophobia at the close the play, which simultaneously denies the resolution that is expected from a *deus ex machina* while also revealing the pessimistic nature of what is typically considered a reassuringly 'domestic' and character driven drama.

Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood divides divine appearances in drama into two spatial categories: 'direct' and 'distanced' interactions.¹ Euripides' dramas are particularly famous for the latter type, in which deities are visibly separated from mortals, as beings who appear either in epiphany on high, usually at the close of a play, or on an empty stage unseen by mortal characters, characteristically at the start of the drama.² In other words, there is an overwhelming sense of the Euripidean divine as operating at the margins of human action. Familial epiphanies, however, complicate this emphasis on the distance and disparity between the mortal and immortal worlds, doubly so in this particular case, given that the Dioscuri appear both as semi-divine, and closely bound to the mortals on stage. The divine twins' kinship with Orestes and Electra in fact leads to a different sort of epiphany, one that is dominated by mortal concerns. Immediately following Castor's initial pronouncements *ex machina*, Orestes, Electra and the chorus proceed to interrogate the god (and his silent brother) and to demand further details of their fate, thus denying an end to the drama by further lengthening the play's final scene. The closing *deus ex machina* in *Electra* is one in which the god is assaulted by a barrage of questions and doubts from his niece and nephew below, and unsuccessfully attempts to assuage their various fears. This unexpected conversation initiated by the mortals in fact overshadows the god's original speech in terms

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1. Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 459.

2. Deities in epiphany to mortals: Artemis (*Hipp.*), Thetis (*Andr.*), Athena (*Supp.*, *IT*, *Ion*, cf. *Erec.*), Dioscuri (*El.*, *Hel.*), Apollo (*Or.*), Dionysus (*Ba*). Deities who appear on an empty stage: Apollo (*Alc.*), Aphrodite (*Hipp.*), Poseidon and Athena (*Tr.*), Hermes (*Ion*), Dionysus (*Ba*). On the use of the stage's upper level and the crane, see Mastronarde (1990).

of length; Orestes and Electra's pointed exchange with Castor (69 lines) is longer than his *deus* speech (55 lines). By including a series of unprecedented questions and complaints directed to a deity who has made himself manifest, Euripides not only prolongs the typical scene of *deus ex machina*, but he also crucially shifts the balance of power, allowing mortals more control over an experience that typically embodies the awesome power of the gods over humans.

As a result of this unusual closing dynamic, the involvement of the Dioscuri, gods who specialize in saving mortals, ironically does not provide the sense of resolution that is typically associated with such divine epilogues.³ Castor's opening pronouncements *ex machina* contain a series of blunt and extraordinary admissions, which set the tone for this atypical scene.⁴ He notoriously declares that Clytemnestra's murder is just (δίκαια), but not Orestes' act (οὐ δ' οὐχὶ δρᾶς, 1244).⁵ Equally troubling is his admission that Apollo, despite being wise did not proclaim his oracle wisely (σοφὸς δ' ὦν οὐκ ἔχρησέ σοι σοφά, 1246). After Castor has systematically laid out the future for the living and the dead on stage (instructions which include a neat summary of the plot of the *Eumenides* at 1258-1272),⁶ he furthermore reveals that Orestes and Electra's suffering is a minor episode in a larger saga of devastation decreed by Zeus for all mortals: Helen did not go to Troy, as Zeus, who wanted to cause strife and murder among men, sent a phantom instead (1282-3). Whether or not we read this as an advertisement for the *Helen* of 412, in dramatic terms the god's pronouncement unravels a major strand in the mythical fabric that underpins Greek song

3. West (1987), 287, summarizes the general functions of a god from the machine as follows, '(a) to tell people things that they cannot otherwise know about what has been happening — especially about divine actions and motives; (b) to issue such instructions and predictions as will tie the plot of the play up with other traditions about what happened to these persons, subsequent reigns, marriages, descendants, cults, etc.; (c) to deal with loose ends in the drama as it stands.'

4. The few critics of *Electra* who do consider the play's final scene inordinately focus on Castor's initial perplexing statements concerning Apollo and largely neglect the prolonged and more extensive second half of the scene, e.g. Whitehorne (1978), Judet de la Combe (2012), and Pucci (2012).

5. The text of *Electra* quoted here, and throughout the article, is that of Cropp (2013).

6. Cf. Pucci (2012), 310.

culture precisely at the close of the play.⁷ Throughout the remainder of the scene, the poet appears to undermine Castor's authority and omniscience, accentuating his unstable position as a semi-immortal and part-time god. In particular, as the god's interaction with his niece and nephew is further drawn out, Castor is pulled back and forth between the realm of the mortal and the divine, as the poet charts the fluctuations in his ambiguous status.

That a familial epiphany — characteristically an intimate and direct intervention by a most familiar god — leads to a lack of resolution precisely at the play's end allows us a rare opportunity to rethink the theological and dramaturgical nature of the *deus ex machina* and other moments of divine epiphany in Greek tragedy.⁸ The multifarious modalities of divine appearances in tragedy and their varying implications is already a fraught topic, one that furthermore becomes more complex when we consider that in a genre characterized by representation, the presentation of divine revelation could have also evoked the masked impersonation of a god in ritual contexts.⁹ The problem of how to interpret divine involvement in tragedy is more pronounced in the Euripidean corpus, in which gods not only appear frequently, but also tend to do so for vengeful and petty purposes.¹⁰ This has contributed to reductive charges that the dramatist was impious or hostile to the gods.¹¹ At the same time, *dei ex machina* are highly *familiar* theatrical interventions, containing recognizable features such as aetiologies that function in order to keep a dramatic plot in check (as is, most prominently the case in the *Orestes*).¹² Such features make these closing

7. This is in contrast to serving as the premise of a new story, as in Stesichorus' *Palinode* or Euripides' *Helen*.

8. On divine appearances in tragedy, see esp. Easterling (1993), Pucci (1994), Dunn (1996), Mastronarde (2002), Wildberg (2002), and Sourvinou-Inwood (2003).

9. Cf. Burkert (1985), 186.

10. From Artemis' apologies in *Hippolytus* to Dionysus' revelations in *Bacchae*, over half of surviving tragedies by Euripides end with a *deus ex machina*, one of Euripides' characteristic devices: *Hipp.*, *Andr.*, *Supp.*, *Ion*, *El.*, *IT*, *Hel.*, *Or.*, and *Ba.* (cf. *Rhes.*). According to Jouan (2000), 29, the proportion in the fragmentary plays appears to be the same.

11. These charges have their origins in antiquity, cf. Ar. *Th.* 450-2 and *Ra.* 888-93. See also Lefkowitz (1989), and Michelini (1987), 315-20.

12. Critics from antiquity onwards take issue with the *deus*' remarkable ability to provide closure in a summary fashion, which is often achieved by means of an arbitrary resolution to a plot, cf. Pl., *Cra.* 425d, Arist.

scenes one of the most conventional of Greek tragedy.¹³ As I illustrate through the example of *Electra*, tragic epiphanies can be far from reassuring impositions of divine and poetic order, but rather shocking and unsettling interventions. I argue that in *Electra* Euripides problematizes mortals' encounters with gods through a unique scene of prolonged exposure to the divine. Paradoxically, this unusually drawn-out contact with the divine reveals divinities that are less reassuringly godlike, which itself undoes the promise of salvation that was initially offered by the personal involvement of the gods. That Euripides utilizes the Dioscuri — who are personally related to the mortals on stage — to achieve this is truly exceptional: epiphany is the main *modus operandi* for these semi-divine brothers in their guise as σωτήρες and protectors of humans. Furthermore, Castor is invoked at various points in the play as Electra's intended and original husband; his sudden appearance at the end of the play as an omniscient figure, directing the action and predicting the future, has a jarring dramatic effect.

Finally, the notion of familial epiphany sheds special light on Euripides' *Electra*, a play which has been much maligned in the history of ancient Greek tragic criticism. The play is rarely appreciated on its own terms, since most critics tend to discuss it almost exclusively in relation to other tragedies dealing with the vengeance of Orestes, namely, Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* and Sophocles' *Electra*, to the ultimate detriment of Euripides' version.¹⁴ Indeed,

Po. 1454a37-b6, *Alex. fr.* 126, 15-19, *Cic. ND* 1. 20. 53, and *Hor. Ars P.* 191-2. *Antiph. fr.* 189.13-16 (PCG), notes in particular that the use of a *deus* masks the incompetence of the tragic poets. Recent scholarship focusing on performative and metatheatrical aspects has allowed us to see these moments anew, in particular relating to the function of the *deus* as a *didaskalos* figure, with the power to shape the play and redirect the flow of dramatic and mythical action into some future beyond the tragic stage; cf. Easterling (1993) and Mastronarde (2005).

13. Dunn (1996) examines the *deus ex machina* as a critical component of the larger rhetoric of closure in Euripidean plays, a device serving the same function as closing anapests by the chorus (cf. Sourvinou-Inwood [2003], 414-422).

14. This tone was set in the nineteenth century, when Schlegel (1883), 133, pronounced the *Electra* to be 'perhaps the very worst of Euripides' pieces,' claiming that 'whatever there is of the tragical in his drama is not his own, but belongs either to fable, to his predecessors, or to tradition.' For similar damning pronouncements, see Kitto (1939), 330, and Conacher (1967), 203. In the past few decades, scholars arguing for a self-conscious interpretation of Euripides' version have continued to rely on comparison as a primary means of assessing the play: recent epithets given to the *Electra* include 'decadent' (Burnett [1998], 226-7, argues that the play offers 'the representation of a heroic human action in its decadence'), 'realist' (Lloyd [1986] and Porter [1990], 255;

even the textual transmission of these plays privileges the other two presumably earlier versions as well as the later *Orestes*,¹⁵ which, unlike Euripides' *Electra*, survived largely thanks to their popularity as one of the 'classic' seven plays chosen in antiquity to represent each dramatist.¹⁶ Nevertheless, though many of Euripides' plays are now hailed as innovative and clever,¹⁷ his *Electra* continues suffer from comparison with its Aeschylean and Sophoclean cousins. With few exceptions,¹⁸ scholars tend to focus on the perceived deficiencies of the play, all of which emerge from excessive comparison to the other two versions.¹⁹ In their routine readiness to find Euripides' *Electra* wanting, modern critics often dismiss its most novel contribution to the saga of Orestes: the use of the Dioscuri as *dei ex machina*.²⁰ In a play otherwise distinguished by the absence of the divine,²¹ the sudden closing turn to a *deus ex machina* might be unexpected, but my focus on familial epiphany allows us to appreciate this novel ending as a reflection of the play's unique claustrophobia and the awkward emphasis on the familial. Rather than seeing it as a reductive or risqué version of Aeschylus' or Sophocles' dramas, Euripides' *Electra* dares to solve the problem of the house of Atreus as internally as possible, relying only on family members in both the

cf. Goff [1999-2000]), and even 'mirror' (Pucci [2012]), descriptions which assume extensive familiarity with other tragic versions of the myth.

15. Critics are unsure as to which play came first, Sophocles' or Euripides' *Electra*. Denniston (1939) dates Euripides' version to 413 BC, citing Castor's comment in *El.* 1347-8 about sailing to Sicily (read as an allusion to the Athenian expedition to Sicily; cf. Thuc. 7.20.2 and 7.42.1) as well as the god's references in 1280-3 to Helen's *eidolon* in Troy while she physically remained in Egypt (*Helen* was performed in 412). Scholars who have studied the number of resolutions in Euripides' iambic trimeter (which increase from 420s onward) have, however, suggested an earlier date for his *Electra*: see Zielinski (1925), 133-240, Ritchie (1964), 260-3, and Dale (1967), xxiv-xxviii. Donzelli (1978), 27-71 provides a summary.

16. *Electra* has survived in two papyrus texts with selections from the play and two 14th century medieval manuscripts, L and P. See Denniston (1939), xxxix-xliv, for a history of the text and its transmission.

17. Late plays such as *IT* and *Helen* have benefited in particular; see, e.g. Wright (2005), Hall (2013), and Marshall (2014).

18. E.g. Dingel (1969), Zeitlin (1970), Cropp (1986), Goff (1999-2000), Marshall (1999-2000).

19. It may be argued that the play itself invites such comparison, particularly with Aeschylus' *Oresteia*; see Goldhill (1986), 247-50.

20. Some critics (Vickers [1973], 564-66, and Gellie [1981], 8-9) have even expressed disappointment that the play does not end at 1232, prior to the entrance of the Dioscuri. Cf., however, Whitehorne (1978), 6-8.

21. Unlike other versions, there are no oracles or dreams in Euripides' *Electra*, cf. Mastronarde (2002), 46.

human and divine realms.²² Though Euripides' *Electra* begins with a broken and dysfunctional family in which all members are separated, the only version in which the siblings are both living away from the house of Agamemnon, the drama takes place within a deeply intimate familial setting, in which all characters are connected to one another by blood or marriage.²³ The sudden appearance of these divine uncles reflects a claustrophobic world, in which even the gods cannot escape these deadly mortal associations and concerns. This article thus offers a new understanding of the complex social and familial world uncovered by Euripides' play through a focus on its enigmatic and poorly understood final scene. Euripides' *Electra* emerges as the most inward looking version of the Orestes saga, in which vengeance is not only enacted within the family but also allegedly resolved within it. Whereas Aeschylus outsources the problem of the matricide to Athens and its civic gods in *Eumenides*, and Sophocles lets the subject fester unresolved, Euripides offers the house of Atreus' own unique and familial gods as saviours. However, Castor's failure to respond to the legitimate concerns of his niece (to whom he was formerly betrothed) and nephew illustrates that in Euripides' saga of Electra and Orestes, divine order is tenuous and fragile.

FAMILIAR AND FAMILIAL EPIPHANIES IN TRAGEDY

Before turning to the Dioscuri's revelations to their niece and nephew at the close of Euripides' *Electra*, a brief word on other analogous moments is warranted, in order to describe what makes 'familial epiphany' so compelling a category for Greek tragedy. Ancient Greek gods manifested their power through bodily presence. Their epiphanies to mortals are uniquely corporeal, allowing them to mingle and procreate with humans. This physicality, however, rarely figures in critical considerations of the tragic *deus ex machina*. When

22. The farmer may be seen as a crucial exception, but I would contend that his marriage to Electra, though unconsummated, brings him into the family fold. In fact, at the end of the play, Castor *ex machina* simply refers to him as Orestes' 'brother-in-law' (πενθερός, 1286).

23. The only exception, Pylades, is hailed by Orestes as his only friend, as he emphasizes the strong ties of φιλία between them (82-4). Electra similarly refers to him as Orestes' 'brother-in-arms' (παρὰσπιστής, 885).

scholars do treat these scenes as representations of divine epiphanies (as opposed to a convenient literary device), they do not dwell on the precarious status of the manifesting deity, and focus instead on questions related to tragedy as a mimetic medium, such as whether these sudden divine appearances in tragedy were seen as true theophanies by the original audience, and whether they should likewise be understood as such.²⁴ If the status of the divine, particularly as impersonated by human actors, is uncertain in moments of tragic epiphany, it is likely to be more so in the case of familial and familiar epiphanies, which feature gods who are especially intimate with those on stage, whether on account of a friendship or a more personal connection such as marriage or kinship. It might seem reasonable to assume that the revelation of such a familiar and especially familial divinity is no longer invested with the same sense of awe or terror. More importantly, in a genre which focuses on fate and human suffering in a world dictated by divine will, characters can now directly ask their divine relatives about the justice of the gods, and receive less impersonal answers. Scenes featuring familial gods, such as the closing moments of Euripides' *Electra*, thus have the potential to provide direct and intimate insight into the workings of the divine.

Castor's apparition to Orestes and Electra in Euripides' *Electra* is only one of three familial epiphanies in the extant tragic corpus, along with Dionysus in *Bacchae* and Thetis' appearance to her husband Peleus in Euripides' *Andromache*, which will be examined below.²⁵ More common in tragedy, though, is the involvement of the familiar divine, that is,

24. See esp. Easterling (1993), Pucci (1994), Sourvinou-Inwood (1997) and (2003), 459-512, Wildberg (1999-2000) and (2002), Wiles (2007), 231-60, esp. 234, where he discusses the religious effect of Dionysiac masking on a mass audience. On the ambiguous status of the Greek divine, see esp. Vernant 1991: 27-49.

25. Familial epiphany may have also featured in the fragmentary plays *Alope* (Poseidon) and *Hypsipyle* (Dionysus). I do not include Athena's appearance in *Ion*, though she is technically Ion's aunt, given that the play is ultimately about Athens and she is invoked as patron goddess of the city, cf. Loraux (1993), ch. 5 and Papadopoulou (2001), 302-3. Euripides in fact flirts with the possibility of a familial epiphany at the end of *Ion*: Immediately after Ion states his intention to confront and question his father (1546-8), he suddenly alerts the audience of the arrival of a god, precisely by asking which of the gods appears in the blazing sun (1550). Instead of the sun god, Euripides offers us Athena. Sophocles' fragments may have yielded more familial *ex machina* interventions: *Polyxena* (fr. 523) opens with Achilles' ghost addressing the Greek army, an audience which would have included his son Neoptolemus. *Syndeipnoi* featured Thetis who manifests herself before Agamemnon and Achilles. *Peleus* may have likewise featured Thetis *ex machina* intervening to save her

gods who were personally known to mortals, such as Athena in Sophocles' *Ajax*, Apollo in Euripides' *Alcestis*, Artemis in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, and Heracles in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*.²⁶ In the case of familiar divinities, tragedians seem to apply a loose Homeric model of disguised or audible deities, in which a god either dons a different (typically mortal) shape (e.g. Apollo in *Alcestis*), or allows herself only to be heard (i.e. there is no visual recognition, only auditory, e.g. Athena in *Ajax*).²⁷ Despite the deities' involvement, boundaries between mortals and immortals remain in place despite any affinities that may be expressed across this firm divide. This is certainly the case in Sophocles' *Ajax*, which opens with Athena in conversation with both Odysseus and Ajax. Though it may be that Athena's extended interaction with these heroes makes her appearance radically different from those involving other prologue gods (such as Aphrodite in *Hippolytus* or Hermes in *Ion*), as some scholars have pointed out,²⁸ the goddess nevertheless remains distant and impenetrable. If anything, her personal involvement in the drama makes Athena seem more menacing, further asserting the distinction between mortals and immortals.

In *Hippolytus* and *Philoctetes*, however, the eponymous heroes' close affinity with the deities who usher the end of the play produces a different type of epiphanic scene. Like other deities who speak from the *theologeion* above the *skēnē* in the final scene of a drama, Artemis offers authoritative resolution and rectifies any misunderstandings, in particular

husband. Lyndsay Coe, however, tells me that there is no direct evidence for such an appearance by the goddess, since this is a hypothesis based on the assumption that the same episode in Euripides' *Dictys* is a fair representation of Sophocles' play.

26. Only two fragmentary plays by Euripides seem to have featured a familiar divinity: *Phrixus B* (Ino who had nursed baby Dionysus invokes his aid), and *Alcmeon in Corinth* (Apollo, but he delivers the prologue to an empty stage). Sophocles' *Triptolemus* has an appearance by Demeter, which would make this another example of a familiar epiphany, if in this version the protagonist is indeed the child whom in myth the goddess attempted to make immortal while grieving for her daughter Persephone.

27. On this model, see Pucci (1985), (1988), and (1994). This, of course, has one major exception: Thetis' appearances to her own son Achilles (e.g. *Il.* 1.357-427, 18.70f., 19.1-39, 24.122-40). Slatkin (2011), 57-8, however, discusses Achilles' unique prayers to his mother, which deviate from the standard structure of Homeric prayers to gods by humans, as one of the ways in which the epic singles out the hero's status as more than a mortal, and closer to a god. Regarding disguised deities in tragedy, Apollo addresses an empty stage in *Alcestis*, but his familiarity with Admetus stems from an earlier time when he was a guest of his while in disguise (cf. *E. Alc.* 1-2, 8-12).

28. E.g. Finglass (2011), 136.

achieving forgiveness between father and son as she clarifies matters to Theseus (1281-1341). Her appearance is not surprising in the least to a viewing audience, whether ancient or modern, given her prominence in the play and Hippolytus' devotion to her.²⁹ Perhaps more unexpected is the manner in which the tenor of the scene changes as soon as the wounded Hippolytus is brought on stage. The goddess no longer exhorts and commands but rather freely converses with her companion for the latter part of the extended scene (1389-1439), a large part of which is conducted in a noticeably personal stichomythic dialogue. She even sympathizes with Hippolytus, unusually addressing him as ὦ τλήμων (1389, 1394).³⁰ Such an extended and free interaction between goddess and mortal, particularly one conducted in single-line dialogue exchange, both accentuates and enacts their special relationship, which had been proleptically emphasized throughout the play. Nevertheless there are limits to her friendship with Hippolytus: she must depart before her mortal friend expires, as it is not allowed for gods to be defiled by mortal death (1437). Euripides' decision to involve Artemis personally at the close of the play ultimately vindicates Hippolytus, particularly since his cult in Troezen is now presented as a positive reward from the goddess (who speaks of 'supreme honours', 1424), rather than a cautionary tale that formed part of the cult of Aphrodite, as was traditionally the case.³¹

If Artemis offers vindication to her dying hunting companion, Heracles facilitates Philoctetes' return to Troy and imbues his abandoned friend with a sense of dignity.³² In *Philoctetes*, Sophocles presents us with a divine intervention that is ironically centred on the mortal experience: though Heracles' speech contains commands from Zeus (τὰ Διός

29. Hartigan (1991), 45, points out that various invocations and hymns by the chorus, which underline Artemis' immense dramatic importance, have already made the goddess manifest before the final scene.

30. This unexpected direct sympathy has prompted Hamilton (1982), 45, to comment that this line 'should probably be given to the chorus', though the mss. clearly indicate that these lines belong to Artemis.

31. Larson (2007), 123.

32. Heracles is only mentioned four times before his appearance, three as the owner of the prized bow, the source of his heroic glory (262, 944, 1406), and only once, indirectly, as Philoctetes' friend (1131). On Heracles' dramatic relevance, see Schein (2013), 334-5.

βουλεύματα, 1415), the bulk of it is essentially a personal paraenesis directly addressed to a friend in distress.³³ Unlike other gods who continually draw attention to their divine authority in order to impose their commands on the mortals below,³⁴ Heracles underlines his personal connection to Philoctetes from the outset: he has left heaven for his sake (1412) in order to counsel his friend (1434). Furthermore, though he openly acknowledges his new divinity at 1420, his former humanity is still key; the new god, for example, stresses his mortal suffering at 1418-20.³⁵ Arguably a divine intervention is necessary to break the impasse between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes, but the particular choice of Heracles enables Philoctetes to go more willingly — and even amiably — to where mythic tradition dictates, a place which had become more repulsive to the protagonist as a result of Neoptolemus' betrayal and pretence of friendship.³⁶ Philoctetes' response also radically differs from typical assenting responses to commands by a *deus ex machina*: switching to anapests, the hero emotionally admits to have longed for Heracles' voice, before even agreeing to obey his friend (1445-7), and later lists the 'judgement of his friends' (1467) as the second of three things that bring him to Troy, after mighty Fate (μεγάλη Μοῖρα, 1466) but before Zeus (ὁ πανδαμάτωρ δαίμων, 1467-8). Robert Parker once wrote that the Sophoclean divine is 'distant and elusive' despite saturating the poet's dramatic world.³⁷ Seen in this light, this rather mortally skewed immortal intervention stands out, particularly as the only surviving divine epilogue.³⁸ Compared to the only other direct intervention by a god in the extant Sophoclean corpus, namely, Athena's Machiavellian involvement at the opening of *Ajax*, Heracles' friendly overtures become even more exceptional.

33. Cf. Hawthorne (2006) on his speech as a *mythos*, an authoritative discourse.

34. E.g. E. *Hipp.* 1285, *Supp.* 1183, *IT* 1436, *Or.* 1626.

35. Holt (1989). On Heracles' cult in Athens, see Woodford (1971).

36. There is also an important metatheatrical element at play, given that Heracles must have been played by third actor, who also played the role of the merchant and Odysseus: see Falkner (1998), 47 n.80 and Ringer (1998), 122.

37. Parker (1999), 11.

38. Other gods who physically appear on Sophocles' stage are Athena (*Ajax*), Demeter (*Triptolemus*), Thetis (*Syndeipnoi*), Apollo and Artemis (*Niobe*), cf. Parker (1999), 11-12.

If these familiar epiphanies are able to produce a more poignant dynamic which focuses on the experience of the protagonist, familial epiphanies are from the outset spectacular affairs that stress the divine: both the arrival of Thetis in *Andromache* and the Dioscuri in *Electra* are preceded by elaborate descriptions of the sudden arrival and presence of a god,³⁹ making them the only two such marked epilogue epiphanies in the extant Euripidean corpus,⁴⁰ whereas Dionysus takes centre stage in the *Bacchae*, singling out the entire tragedy as an extended epiphanic performance by the god. A closer look at both *Andromache* and *Bacchae* reveals that they are also extraordinary in the two extremes which they offer mortals: solace and devastation, respectively, both of which significantly affect an audience's sense of the plays' closure. In *Andromache*, Thetis does not solve a crucial impasse as Heracles does in *Philoctetes*, or achieve a resolution between protagonists as Artemis in *Hippolytus*; rather she offers gratuitous consolation and a closure that goes beyond the original drama. The goddess who is elsewhere preeminent as a mourning figure, helpless for her grief,⁴¹ now counsels her ex-husband not to be too discouraged by his present misfortunes (καὶ πρῶτα μὲν σοι τοῖς παρεστῶσιν κακοῖς μηδέν τι λίαν δυσφορεῖν παρήνεσα, 1233-4). Thetis seemingly appears to cheer her former husband, who mourns their dead grandson and by extension the extinction of his legitimate family line, by promising a new life together with her. With an explanation of the origin of their grandson's well-known tomb at Delphi (1239-1243), she silences Peleus' mournful complaints for Neoptolemus, which had dominated the previous scene (1173-1225), and generally assures a happy ending for both Peleus and Andromache in a future that takes place well beyond the play (1247-52). Of course Thetis' involvement has dramatic relevance in a play uniquely centred on marriage,⁴² and which furthermore takes

39. *Andr.* 1226-30 and *El.* 1233-37.

40. The only other marked epiphany is Lyssa's intervention in *HF* 815-21, which is already striking due to its unusual position in the middle of the play.

41. Slatkin (2011), 30-51.

42. As evidenced by the numerous appeals and references to marriage throughout the play: e.g. Andromache's marriage to Hector (1-5 and 222-5), Peleus' to Thetis (42-6), Hermione's to Neoptolemus (29-

place in the Thetideion (20), which takes its name from Thetis' marriage to Peleus.⁴³ Nevertheless, her sudden benevolent appearance, and in particular her swift silencing of Peleus' mourning through her promise of a brighter future, instantly transforms the general tenor and direction of the drama towards its exact polar opposite. Thetis' involvement at the end of *Andromache* may thus be cited as a quintessential example of the easy manner in which a *deus ex machina* can usher the end of a play. However, I would argue that such a radical and rapid transition, from great suffering and destruction to happiness and even contentedness, precisely at the close of the play instead prompts a viewing audience to become suspicious of such meddling, and ultimately undermines any sense of resolution and closure.⁴⁴

Viewed from this perspective, Dionysus' singular manifestation to his unbelieving cousin and aunts in *Bacchae*, which produces utter devastation and destruction, coheres to a more consistent closure. As 'the god of the most immediate presence',⁴⁵ he takes personal and direct charge, exacting vengeance against his immediate family who derided his mother. This tale of destruction and retribution at the hands of an epiphanic god is not uncommon in the larger context of Dionysiac myth and art.⁴⁶ There existed, for example, other earlier revenge tragedies which were likewise centred on Dionysus' ire, such as Aeschylus' *Lycurgeia*, a tetralogy which dramatized Dionysus' vengeance against Lycurgus of Thrace, who like his cousin had also banned the god's cult. Though not much is known about this lost series of plays written and staged prior to *Bacchae*, we can probably assume that Dionysus' revenge in Aeschylus' drama was not as extreme and brutal as that depicted by Euripides, who sets the

39), Helen's to Menelaus (590-604), Andromache's new marriage to Helenus (1243-5), even Hermione's former betrothal to Orestes (966-81). On the choice of Thetis, see Allan (2000), 259, who writes that the appeal of the goddess works on both a visual and thematic level.

43. At the start of the play, Andromache is a suppliant precisely here at the altar of Thetis, which would have been placed in the centre of the orchestra, cf. Rehm (1988).

44. Allan (2000), 264, likewise draws attention to this unusual closure: 'the tensions thus reverberate behind the *deus ex machina* speech and create a closure which is partially "open, cracked, unhealed"' (quoting Taplin [1996], 199).

45. Otto (1965), 90.

46. See esp. Henrichs (1993), Segal (1997), and Seaford (2006), 39-48.

common theme of divine vengeance within a novel context: the god's own immediate human family. It is precisely the enactment of divine vengeance within the confines of the god's own family that makes the *Bacchae* so singular and powerful.⁴⁷

From Thetis' benevolence in *Andromache* to the vision of utter destruction by Dionysus in *Bacchae*, these two other extant examples of familial epiphanies allow us to see the great power wielded by familial gods, which can both comfort and terrify their relatives in a much more pronounced and extreme manner than other more distant deities. Placed in such a context, the sudden apparition of the Dioscuri, particularly in the aftermath of their sister's death, becomes more fraught. Do the divine brothers arrive in order to avenge a dead sister, or to help their niece and nephew at a time of crisis as their job entails?

DIOSCURI IN CONTEXT

If epiphanies involving familiar and familial gods can create complex scenes which can amplify the boundaries between mortal and immortals, familial epiphanies involving the Dioscuri have the capacity to produce distinctively paradoxical scenarios, given the brothers' ambiguous position and their specialty as epiphanic gods. The Dioscuri possess a unique status, even among the anomalous hero-gods⁴⁸: they are both gods and mortals at the same time, and paradoxically so, as the only example of split and shared divinity in Greek antiquity. Additionally, the twins, whether as gods or heroes, are the most epiphanic beings in the Greek cosmos, with frequently attested appearances throughout the ancient Greek world. If among the gods figures such as Heracles, Dionysus, and Aesclepius were 'naturalized aliens' (παρέγγραπτοι, Luc. *JTr.* 21), Castor and Polydeuces would then occupy a singular

47. Medea's appearance to her husband Jason (*Med.* 1317-1414) likewise has the same catastrophic effect, precisely for the same reason.

48. Cf. Burkert (1985), and Larson (2007), 183. Cicero, (*ND* 3.18.45), doubts their divinity, given that their mothers were mortals, but ultimately allows them as gods after considering their cultic worship.

sort of immigration limbo, as figures simultaneously undocumented and possessing legal status, but who at the same time manifested themselves regularly before mortals as gods.

A cursory glance at the cultic and mythical traditions surrounding the Dioscuri suggests that the twins operated in a similar manner to other ancient Greek demi-gods. Aptly, there were two traditions about the divine twins in Greek antiquity, each of which ascribed them a different father: a local Spartan one as the sons of Tyndareus, and an Aeolian-Ionic one as the sons of Zeus.⁴⁹ On the one hand they were hailed as heroes in Sparta as the Tyndaridae, and connected in particular with Spartan kings and local worship in Therapne, near Sparta.⁵⁰ At the same time they were the Dioscuri (Διὸς κοῦροι, the sons of Zeus), invoked as the ‘saviours’ (σωτῆρες) who would rescue distressed sailors at sea.⁵¹ These varying accounts of both their paternity and special status as something in between gods and heroes present nothing unusual in the world of Greek myth; in fact they place the twins in a similar category to Heracles and Iphicles and heroes such as Perseus and Theseus, who were also characterized by ambiguous parentage.⁵² However, unlike these other figures who obtain divine favour as a result of their heroic exploits, the Dioscuri remain curiously grounded in the familial: mythical accounts surrounding the divine pair tend to connect the brothers either with their famous sister Helen, or with another set of cousins, the Leucippides, Phoebe and

49. Furley and Bremer (2001), 166-171. See also Robbins (2013), esp. 239-41. The two traditions co-exist in the surviving literature: Tyndareus is father of both twins in the *Odyssey* (Hom. *Od.* 11.298-9), whereas Zeus is the father of the twins in the Hesiodic Catalogue of Women, Alcaeus, and their eponymous Homeric Hymns (Hes. fr. 24 M-W; Alc. fr. 34 (Voigt [1971])); *Hymn. Hom.* 17, 33; Pi. *P.* 11.62).

50. Larson (2007), 189-90. In Spartan cult practice they appear to be typical heroes, with tombs and a sanctuary overseen by priestesses called Leucippides (after the mythical sisters Phoebe and Hilaeira who were betrothed to Idas and Lynceus, but were carried off by the twins): cf. Paus. 3.16.1, Ar. *Lys.* 1308-15, and Garvie (1965).

51. The term Dioscuri is attested in various inscriptions as early as the 6th century BC (*CEG* 373, 391, 427; cf. *IG* 12.3 359). In various archaic poems the twins already have the power to save sailors from storms at sea, e.g. *HH* 33, and Alc. fr. 34 (Voigt [1971]). As sons of Zeus, the Dioscuri resemble their Indo-European counterparts in Vedic mythology, the Asvin, the shining horse-owning brothers, cf. West (1975) and Robbins (2013).

52. In a similar manner to Heracles, their connection to mortality provided mortals with an important example of beings who were able to transcend human suffering; cf. Burkert (1985), 213: ‘the Dioskouroi, like Heracles, were also said to have been initiated at Eleusis and were seen as guiding lights for those hoping to break out of the mortal sphere into the realm of the gods.’

Hilaeria.⁵³ In both cases, the twins spur into action at moments involving the forceful abduction of their female relatives: in the case of their oft-abducted sister, they chase after both Theseus and Paris (the latter as far as Lesbos),⁵⁴ whereas they themselves seize the Leucippides at the altar when they are about to marry Idas and Lyceus.⁵⁵

The Dioscuri's peculiar story of divided immortality and shared mortality, however, truly sets them apart from other gods. Various poets focus on the twins' unique and paradoxical ability of splitting both mortality and divinity. Odysseus tells the Phaeacians that the brothers dwell beneath the earth, alive and dead on alternate days (*Od.* 11.298-304), whereas the poet of *Cypria* calls one mortal and the other immortal (fr. 8 Bernabé [1996] = fr. 6 Davies [1988a]).⁵⁶ Pindar, in particular, draws attention to their uncertain status between mortals and immortals,⁵⁷ though he frequently praises the pair as mythical examples of successful athletes (in particular as horsemen).⁵⁸ In the tenth *Nemean*, the poet rationalizes the twins' uniquely divided fate, ascribing each brother a different father in order to explain the unusual manner in which one came to live half the time at Therapne and the other on Olympus (*Pi. N.* 10. 49-91).⁵⁹ This lengthy mythical narrative accounting for the strange existence of these twins, of which only one is the son of Zeus, concludes an ode that begins with an impressive catalogue of heroes (some of whom became immortal and others 'chthonic' heroes) in which the seed

53. Helen: E.g. Hom. *Il.* 3. 237-44 and Hes. fr. 196-204 (M-W). Leucippides: Pind. *Nem.* 10 and *Theoc.* 22. 137f. It is also possible that the Leucippides are referenced in Alc. 5 fr.1 and 8 (Davies [1988b]). Additionally, another group of myths associates them with the Argonautic expedition.

54. *Cypria* fr. 13 Bernabé [1996] = fr. 12 Davies [1988a], Alc. 21 (Davies [1988b]). Hes. frs. 197, 198, 199 (M-W) tell of how the twin brothers organized the contest of giving away Helen's hand in marriage.

55. According to Apollodorus, (3.11.1-2), the rape is the traditional story and the cattle carrying the variant. Pindar (*Nem.* 10) makes the cattle carrying the reason for their quarrel. Pausanias (3.18.11) noted that the rape of the Leucippides was pictured on the Amyclaeon throne at Sparta (ca. 550 BC), and painted a century later by Polygnotus at Athens (cf. Pausanias 1.18.1). See also Sbardella (2003).

56. Cf. Alc. 7 fr. 1 (Davies [1988b]), Robbins (2013). In the *Iliad* (3.243-44), the brothers are simply dead.

57. On Pindar's use of myths concerning heroes who are 'betwixt and between' human and divine, see Bouvrie (2004), 380.

58. This is a connection made elsewhere in *Pi. O.* 3.39, Hom. *Il.* 3.237 and *Od.* 11.300. In *Pi. O.* 3.35-8, Heracles leaves the twins in charge of the Olympic contests when he goes to Olympus. Castor is specifically hailed as a renowned charioteer, for whom a special song, the *Castoreion*, was composed, cf. *Pi. P.* 2.69 and *I.* 1.16.

59. At the close of the poem (80-2), the poet dramatically includes a speech by Zeus in which the god declares that Polydeuces is his son, and that Castor was a product of a mortal sperm (σπέρμα θνατόν).

of Zeus features prominently (*N.* 10. 1-18).⁶⁰ Zeus' paternity reminds us that the epiphany of Greek gods to mortals is uniquely corporeal, frequently producing children with an ambiguous station between gods and humans. In *Dialogue of the Gods*, Lucian's Apollo and Hermes similarly discuss various paradoxes unique to the twins, hailed as the sons of Zeus: not only each brother's half-existence as both dead (νεκρός) and a god (θεός) gained as a result of their brotherly love (φιλαδελφία), but also the problem of how to distinguish these identical twins who are never seen together, only separately (*DDeor* 25). The sun god concludes that this half-existence is not wise, as the brothers never achieve the thing they most wanted, which was to see each other.⁶¹

These mythical uncertainties regarding the brothers' unique existence, however, did not extend to their cult worship, in which the twins' characteristic mode of action is joint and decisive epiphany. The brothers intervened at moments of crisis, manifesting themselves before mortals who require their assistance. The Dioscuri in fact had the largest number of documented epiphanies throughout the ancient Greek world.⁶² Not only were they said to accompany the Spartans in battle,⁶³ but they also purportedly appeared in other major conflicts to help those who called upon them for *summachia* (alliance) and *boētheia* (help), such as the Locrians during the Second Messenian War.⁶⁴ The Dioscuri's manifestations before mortals were such frequent and regular occurrences that dedications to them have

60. I am grateful to Thomas Coward for sharing his reading of this ode, and in particular how this catalogue offers the audience the variety of options of after-life existence for the Dioscuri. In this way, the catalogue, which brings together tales of Theban and Argive heroes, places the typically Spartan myth of the Dioscuri in a wider context. For the unusual placing of the myth at the end of the ode, see Henry (2005), 91. The Dioscuri are also dramatically summoned at the close of *Pi.* *P* 11.

61. *DDeor* 25: Οὐ ξυνετήν, ὦ Ἑρμῆ, τὴν νομήν, οἳ γε οὐδὲ ὄφονται οὕτως ἀλλήλους, ὅπερ ἐπόθουν, οἷμαι, μάλιστα·

62. Ancient historians have cited various reported sightings of the brothers during critical moments in Greek history. Sources ranging from Herodotus to Pausanias discuss prominent 'military epiphanies' in which the twins successfully aid a struggling army, e.g. *Hdt.* 5.75, *Diod. Sic.* 8.32.1-2, *Plut. Lys.* 12.1, *Paus.* 4.16.9, *Paus.* 4.27.1-3. See also Pritchett (1979), Lorenz (1992), and Bravo (2004).

63. Pritchett (1979), 14f., *Diod. Sic.* 8.32, *Just. Epit.* 20.2-3. Though Herodotus (5.75.2) clarifies that if one of the kings remains in Sparta, one of the twins stays with him, cf. Pritchett (1979), 14. Cartledge (2001), 62, points out that this practice reflected both the divine and heroic descent of Spartan kings.

64. *Diod. Sic.* 8.32, *Strabo* 6.1.10.261, *Just. Epit.* 20.3. See also Simonides' *Battle of Plataea*. On their involvement in Roman battles, see e.g. *Cic. ND.* 2.2.6 and *Dion. Hal. Ant.* 6.13.1-3.

survived from antiquity, including a spear from Lesbos.⁶⁵ The brothers were allegedly present at various crucial junctures spanning the entire fifth-century BC, not only at both the battles of Salamis and Plataea, but even at Aegospotami,⁶⁶ where they appeared before Lysander's ship shining like stars.⁶⁷

The ritual of *theoxenia* associated with the brothers in particular reveals the significance of epiphany in their cult worship.⁶⁸ Participants would offer food on the table as an open invitation for the brothers to join the banquet. Various depictions exist of the twins attending such a ritual, and in all these, the humans are depicted as expectantly waiting for the Dioscuri's apparition.⁶⁹ As Bravo points out, these scenes invariably focus on the transitory moment of the brothers' actual arrival, rather than depicting them as banqueting with the mortal worshippers.⁷⁰ In this way this ritual not only accentuates the transient nature of epiphany itself, but it also illustrates how aptly suited these particular brothers are to such fleeting revelations, given their own precarious position as beings situated uncertainly and ambiguously between gods and heroes.

In a genre peopled by heroes, who are themselves mid-way between gods and common mortals, it might be expected that this ambiguous and epiphanic pair would have some prominence. Yet the Dioscuri appear only twice in the extant tragic corpus, at the close of Euripides' *Helen* and *Electra*, plays which crucially involve their sisters.⁷¹ Though Euripides consistently associates the pair with Helen (e.g. *E. Tro.* 132-3, and *E. Hel.*, a play which

65. Camp (1978).

66. Pritchett (1979).

67. According to Plut. *Lys.* 18.1 and Cic. *Div.* 1.75, this prompted the Spartans to dedicate bronze stars at Delphi as a thank offering, cf. Cook (1914), 761-2.

68. Bravo (2004). In the tenth *Nemean*, Pindar traces the success of Theaius and his family to the fact that their ancestor, Pamphaës, once hosted the twins at a banquet (Pi. *N.* 10.49-50), cf. Schol. Pi. *N.* 10. 49. On the Dioscuri enjoying banquets, see also Sim. T80d Poltera (2008) = 510 PMG; Pi. *O.* 3.40; and 'Dioskouroi' 114 LIMC III.

69. Bravo (2004), Klöckner (2010), 122.

70. Bravo (2004), 74-5.

71. Besides the twins' appearances in *Electra* and *Helen*, the Dioscuri are mentioned in this capacity in *Hec.* 769 and 943, *Tro.* 132 and 1000, and *Or.* 1636.

highlights their special link as her brothers),⁷² they do not appear before their famed sister at the close of her eponymous play. Rather, they manifest themselves to Theoclymenus, at a point when the Egyptian is about to kill his own sister, making their appearance thematically relevant in the name of brotherly duty. In *Electra*, however, not only do they reveal themselves *ex machina* to their mortal niece and nephew, but they do so immediately as a direct result of the death of their less famous sister, Clytemnestra, with whom they are rarely connected.⁷³ At the end of the drama, Euripides presents his audience with a singular epiphany by gods who not only specialize in epiphany, but who manifest themselves spectacularly by means of the crane in the direct presence of their sister's corpse,⁷⁴ which is displayed on the *ekkyklēma* below them. The play thus concludes with an indelible visual of siblings who occupy completely opposite ends of the spectrum of existence, immortal beings and a lifeless body. Though this tableau may be the only one of its kind in extant tragedy, it nevertheless encapsulates the strange reality of the Dioscuri, as brothers who paradoxically alternate between immortality and death.

UNCLES EX MACHINA

While the Dioscuri's epiphany presents a singular visual tableau at the close of Euripides' *Electra*, their manifestation, which critics treat as unproblematic,⁷⁵ takes on enhanced meaning when considered in light of both familial epiphany and of the wider ambiguities surrounding the Dioscuri, raising in particular crucial questions regarding the play's closure. Euripides summons them at an especially fraught juncture in the drama, in the uncertain

72. E.g. *Hel.* 205, 284, 720, 1495-1511 (the third *stasimon*), and especially during their *ex machina* speech at the close of the play.

73. She is only connected to the twins and her sister *Helen* in one account narrating that two eggs were born to Leda, see Gantz (1993), 320-1. Cf. *E. El.* 988-97.

74. Mastronarde (1990), Marshall (1999-2000).

75. Denniston (1939), 202, sees them as a dramatic convenience, a typical *deus ex machina*, whereas Zuntz (1955), 66 and Cropp (2013), 232 see their epiphany as natural, given their intermediate status and their familial interest. Cf. Donzelli (1978), 197-225.

aftermath of the matricide, immediately after a scene in which Orestes and Electra suddenly express regret for killing their mother. Rather than ending the uncertainty that is opened up by the sudden remorse of the siblings, this prolonged scene of divine intervention instead provides even more ambiguity: Castor, speaking on behalf of the pair, offers a series of platitudes and contradictions that ultimately accentuate the impossible nature of Orestes and Electra's quandary as matricides. The Dioscuri's credibility is furthermore undermined by the fact that the poet continually draws attention to their ambiguous status both as divine authorial figures and as relatives who are closely bound to the mortals on stage.⁷⁶ The failure of these divine figures, famed as helpers to humankind, to respond to the concerns raised by their niece and nephew reveals an ironic dimension to the perceived effective meddling of gods in tragedy. Treating the Dioscuri's manifestation before their niece and nephew and their dead sister as a moment of familial epiphany, however, provides a better insight into both the scene and the pessimistic nature of the play itself. In a drama in which the divine is largely absent, it illuminates Euripides' emphasis on the complicated and incestuous familial dynamics of the House of Atreus, particularly as a family in which sibling pairs possess a starring role (e.g. Atreus and Thyestes, Agamemnon and Menelaus, Electra and Orestes).⁷⁷ By involving the Dioscuri for the first time in this particular chapter of the house of Atreus, a house famed for interfamilial violence, the poet demonstrates the ease in which even the gods can become entangled in the house's nefarious affairs, revealing a claustrophobic and inescapable reality.

The Dioscuri appear after an unusual scene in which the poet stages a steady crumbling of resolve and a growing sense of despair following the matricide, arguably at the perfect time for the comforting solution typically offered by a *deus ex machina*. Standing before the

76. Though Castor and Polydeuces are similarly compelled by a family interest in the *Helen*, there they do not appear before their sister, see above.

77. Cf. Jones (2012).

bodies of both Aegisthus and Clytemnestra (on the *ekkyklēma*), Orestes and Electra, who are soaked (πεφυρμένοι, 1172) in their mother's blood, stunningly express regret for this long-awaited act in a shared song with the chorus.⁷⁸ In their remorse, they even reenact their mother's last moments: they mime Clytemnestra's last screams (1214-15), and relive the moment at which the knife cuts her throat (1221-23).⁷⁹ The language of motherhood plays a prominent role in their remorseful song, in particular the verb 'to give birth' (τίκτω) and the word for mother (μᾶτερ).⁸⁰ Whereas the corresponding scenes in *Choephoroi* and Sophocles' *Electra* generally depict the matricide as the unavoidable conclusion to avenging Agamemnon's murder, in his *Electra*, Euripides banishes all thought of the much-lamented father as the poet uniquely directs the focus towards the slain mother.⁸¹ This new focus on and sympathy for the dead Clytemnestra as a mother rather than an adulterous wife responsible for the murder of her husband,⁸² who is furthermore present on stage as a corpse, suddenly and decisively alters the course of the plot and the viewing audience's understanding of the tragedy enacted before them.

A forceful intervention by a deity at this precise point might arguably both illuminate and further elaborate this new direction undertaken as the play draws to a close. The Dioscuri's intervention is indeed presented as a clear example of a divine epiphany, an event which inspires surprise, terror, and awe. Following the matricide, Euripides inserts a prominent

78. This announcement at the moment of the siblings' re-entry onstage (1174-6) becomes more striking when compared with the corresponding moment in Sophocles' *Electra* (1422-3). On announced entrances, see Hamilton (1978), Chourmouziades (1965), 93-108, and Taplin (1977), 327-9, 357-9, 442-3.

79. Burnett (1998), 243, conjectures that the original audience watching this play 'comes as close as any Attic audience ever will to watching a staged act of revenge, and in this case it is a mother-killing.' Aristotle (*Po.* 1453b) includes this moment among a shortlist of tragic incidents which evoke pity and terror.

80. ἔτικτε (1184), τεκοῦσ (1186), τέκνων (1186), ἔτικτεν (1212), ἔτικτες (1229). No less frequent is the word for mother itself: ματρί (1183), μᾶτερ (1186), ματέρα (1197), ματρός (1212), ματρός (1220), ματέρος (1223 and 1127).

81. As they focus almost solely on the death of their mother, its aftermath, and what it means to have killed her, they rewrite the misogynistic ending of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* in which motherhood is denied to Clytemnestra (*A. Eu.* 658).

82. This is a focus that the play had hinted at earlier, when Clytemnestra is summoned on false pretenses to tend to Electra's supposed birth.

announcement of the twins' arrival delivered by the chorus in anapests.⁸³ Their proclamation stresses the divinity of the two arriving brothers:

ἀλλ' οἶδε δόμων ὑπὲρ ἀκροτάτων
βαίνουσί τινες δαίμονες ἢ θεῶν
τῶν οὐρανίων· οὐ γὰρ θνητῶν γ'
ἦδε κέλευθος· τί ποτ' ἐς φανεράν
ὄψιν βαίνουνσι βροτοῖσιν;

(E. *El.* 1233-37)

But here above the top of the house
walk some who are spirits or gods
of the heavens. For of mortals
this is no path. Why are they walking
so openly before mortal eyes?

These verses correspond to a dramatization of religious epiphany. The Dioscuri, whose identity is still unknown, are clearly identified as divine beings, either *daimones* or gods, who are capable of 'walking' (or even simply 'appearing', if one prefers the variant φαίνουσι found in manuscript L at line 1234) above the roof of the house. Such a path is plainly not mortal, and the chorus questions why these divinities are choosing to become manifest before mere humans. No less importantly, this announcement establishes an air of solemnity and awe, preparing the audience for an upcoming divine revelation. As discussed above, this is one of two such marked epilogue epiphanies in Euripides,⁸⁴ along with *Andromache*, where the chorus likewise marvel at the arrival of Thetis:

ἰὼ ἰὼ·
τί κέκίνηται, τίνος αἰσθάνομαι

83. On announced entrances in tragedy, see Mastronarde (1990), 272.

84. The only other marked epiphany is Lyssa's intervention in the *HF* 815-21, which remarkably occurs in the middle of the play.

θείου; κοῦραι, λεύσσετ' ἄθρήσατε·
δαίμων ὄδε τις λευκὴν αἰθέρα
πορθμεύμενος τῶν ἵπποβότων
Φθίας πεδίῳ ἐπιβαίνει.⁸⁵

(E. *Andr.* 1226-30)

iō, iō,

What is this movement, which of the gods do I perceive?

Look, women, see! Here is some deity riding through the

bright air and dismounting on the ground

of horse-pasturing Phthia!

In *Andromache* as in *Electra*, the anapests announce the transition to a new, crucial scene that will involve the appearance of a divinity; they serve to highlight the forthcoming epiphany of a god. References to a divine path (κέλευθος) in *El.* 1235-6 as well as a god riding through the *aithēr* in *Andr.* 1228-9 furthermore imply that Euripides made use of the highly theatrical *mechanē* instead of having the gods simply appear on the *theologeion*.⁸⁶ Yet in the *Electra*, the Dioscuri are made manifest following a *kommos* between Orestes, Electra, and the chorus, who lament the recently committed matricide *at the same time as* Clytemnestra's body lies displayed on the *ekkyklēma*. If this was the case, then for the final tableau of the *Electra*, Euripides utilizes the two mechanical devices that allowed him to bring and display off-stage elements before the audience. The simultaneous use of both devices further underscores the vast chasm that divides the divine brothers on high from their dead sister below.

Despite the overt emphasis on the spectacular nature of this divine epiphany, the gods who appear are highly familiar deities. From the outset, the Dioscuri's own personal connection to

85. The text is that of Diggle (1984).

86. Cf. E. *HF* 817, Ar. *Pax*, 82-101 and 149-72.

the mortals below is emphasized (1238-43). Castor, speaking on behalf of the pair,⁸⁷ introduces himself in terms of the personal relationships which had grounded the twins as mortals, namely their relationship to their dead sister. In offering this description, Castor repeats various synonyms of ‘sibling’: ‘twins’ (σύγγονοι, 1239), ‘brother’ (κασίγνητός, 1240), and ‘sister’ (ἀδελφῆς, 1243), words which pull the god — previously established and anticipated as divine being in the announcement — towards the direction of the mortal. Gods regularly introduce themselves in moments of epiphany, typically as a means to emphasize their divine authority.⁸⁸ In this particular case, the divine twins are depicted as still defining themselves in terms of their human relationships. In fact, Castor reveals that the Dioscuri had been doing their divine job at sea until they happened to notice the murder of their sister, Clytemnestra (1241-3). The revelation that the gods’ involvement is a rather last-minute decision stands in stark contrast to other *deus ex machina* who describe their involvement as messengers of Zeus or commanded by Fate.⁸⁹

Castor’s speech is likewise unusual in terms of his forthrightness. The god, who has just revealed his extensive mortal connections and potential biased outlook due to the last-minute nature of the brothers’ involvement, now offers a subjective commentary on the matricide:

δίκαια μὲν νυν ἦδ’ ἔχει, σὺ δ’ οὐχὶ δρᾷς.
 Φοῖβος δέ, Φοῖβος — ἀλλ’ ἄναξ γάρ ἐστ’ ἐμός,
 σιγῶ· σοφὸς δ’ ὦν οὐκ ἔχρησέ σοι σοφά.

(E. *El.* 1244-6)

Her treatment is just, but not your act.

And Phoebus, Phoebus — but he is my master,

so I keep silent. Wise though he is, he did not proclaim wise things.

87. *Helen* 1642-79 in which the divine twins speak as a pair, given that singular and plural are used indiscriminately. Cf. Denniston (1939), 203.

88. E.g. *Hipp* 1285, *Andr.* 1232, *Supp.* 1183, *Or.* 1626.

89. E.g. *S. Ph.* 1415, *E. IT* 1486, *Or.* 1635.

The repetition of Apollo's name and subsequent accusation reveal an underlying passion in what is supposed to be a 'rather matter-of-fact speech,' as Denniston observes.⁹⁰ This aposiopesis, which is extremely rare in Euripides, has been read as both a damning criticism of Apollo and the decision he made in supporting Orestes' matricide (a criticism which likewise crops up during the *Oresteia* and in Sophocles' version), and as an admission of the demi-god's less authoritative status.⁹¹ I contend that Castor's conflicting comments about the recently committed matricide and in particular his unwillingness to speak about the oracle of Apollo can additionally be treated as symptomatic of a familial epiphany, in particular as a further sign that his mortal side can still powerfully affect the god. Apollo's support for the matricide was a compelling subject for the tragedians⁹²; that Euripides directly addresses it through the subjective figure of Castor in such a blunt manner draws attention to his unusual vantage point between gods and men. These candid comments, though brief, begin to undermine an epiphany which had been presented and anticipated with reverence by the chorus' opening anapests.

Despite such a unusual opening, however, the bulk of Castor's intervention operates in a similar manner as other *deus ex machina* scenes. For forty-four verses (1249-1291) the god predicts the outcome of events for everyone who is present on stage. Not only does he specifically instruct Orestes what to do with Electra (1249), but he also gives a step-by-step account of what will happen to him once the Furies begin to hound him (1252-1275). Castor also outlines what will happen to the body of Aegisthus (1276-7), and the body of Clytemnestra (1278-80); he furthermore tells them how to proceed in the matter of the peasant (1286-7), the only extraneous individual in this version of events. In addition, Euripides meticulously shuts down the possibility of any further plots. Castor also informs

90. Denniston (1939).

91. In *HF* 847f., Lyssa similarly questions the ways of the gods. Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 248, argues that here Castor acknowledges that his view was inferior to Apollo's more authoritative voice.

92. Jedrkiewicz (2012).

them, predicting (or summarizing, depending on whether the *Electra* was produced before or after 412) the plot of *Helen* in 1280-3.⁹³ The god additionally promises that Orestes will find happiness, while evoking the *Oresteia*: εὐδαιμονήσεις τῶνδ' ἀπαλλαχθεὶς πόνων, ('You will find happiness after you have been delivered from these troubles', 1291). Despite the fact that he has just revealed Castor's sympathetic mortal dimension, Euripides now straightforwardly presents him as an authority figure who combines dramaturgical and divine power, directing the subsequent course of events and predicting the future for those on stage.⁹⁴ The contrast between emotional semi-divine god and omniscient deity is jarring.

In general, Euripides' gods do not interact with mortals; their involvement is brief, yet decisive. Usually after such a speech uttered by a god on high, the mortals on stage may offer a few words of acceptance, but invariably everyone soon exits off stage.⁹⁵ Here, Euripides chooses to transform the moment of revelation into an opportunity for conversation. Someone on stage, most probably Orestes, initiates a dialogue with the pair: ὦ παῖδε Διός, θέμις ἐς φθογγὰς / τὰς ὑμετέρας ἡμῖν πελάθειν; ('Sons of Zeus, is it permitted for us to approach you in conversation?', 1292-3). There is scholarly disagreement as to who speaks,⁹⁶ but in any case, to approach a god and engage him in a conversation after an epiphany is a remarkable thing to do. To ask them challenging questions, however, is unheard of, particularly when the gods are challenged to explain their lack of prior involvement:

πῶς ὄντε θεῶ τῇσδ' ἐτ' ἀδελφῶ
τῆς καπθιμένης
οὐκ ἠρκέσατον Κῆρας μελάθροισ;

93. Πρωτέως γὰρ ἐκ δόμων / ἥκει λιποῦσ' Αἴγυπτον οὐδ' ἦλθεν Φρύγας· / Ζεὺς δ', ὥς ἔρις γένοιτο καὶ φόνος βροτῶν, / εἶδωλον Ἑλένης ἐξέπεμψ' ἐς Ἴλιον ('For Helen too returns from the house of Proteus in Egypt. She did not go to Phrygia, but Zeus so as to make strife and bloodshed amongst men dispatched her image to Ilum').

94. Roberts (1988), 192 states that in his late plays Euripides 'tends to tie up loose ends with an exaggerated completeness, answering questions we would not have thought to ask.'

95. Pucci (1994), 15, writes of the 'marginalized gods' of Greek tragedy.

96. Manuscripts list the chorus as a speaker here, but some scholars insist that it must be Orestes, despite the fact that Castor responds that the respondent is allowed, as someone who is not tainted by the murder (θέμις, οὐ μυσσαῖς τοῖσδε σφαγίοις, 1294); see Cropp (2013), 238-9, cf. Kovacs (1985), 310-4.

Why, being gods and brothers

to this dead woman

did you not ward off the Goddesses of death from the house?

Whether posed by Orestes or the chorus, this question, underlines the ambiguous station of the Dioscuri, and their unusual involvement as familial deities, both gods and brothers (ὄντε θεῶ τ' ἀδελφῶ, 1298). To the humans on stage, the Dioscuri possess a dual role and obligation to them as gods, and as brothers of Clytemnestra. The god is quickly dragged into the mortal conversation, switching to anapests in his response, again reverting to a biased view. He offers both platitudes and blame for Apollo: 'Destiny and Necessity led you to what must be, along with the unwise words of Phoebus' tongue' (Μοῖρά σ' Ἀνάγκη τ' ἦγ' ἐς τὸ χρεῶν / Φοίβου τ' ἄσοφοι γλώσσης ἐνοπαί, 1301-2) and 'to Phoebus I ascribe this bloody deed' (Φοίβῳ τήνδ' ἀναθήσω / πράξιν φονίαν, 1296-7). Encouraged by the fact that Castor actually responds, the siblings continue their interrogation of the god and further press him asking specifically what Apollo and what oracles decreed the matricide (1303-4). Castor, however, continues speaking in tired clichés: 'shared acts, and shared destinies, and it was a single doom from your forefathers that destroyed you both' (κοινὰ πράξεις, κοινοὶ δὲ πότμοι, / μία δ' ἀμφοτέρους / ἄτη πατέρων διέκναισεν, 1305-7). When pressed by his niece and nephew as to why the matricide was necessary, Castor's awkward responses spark more intense questioning. His failure to provide an answer for his sister's murder underlines the god's fundamental ignorance, which provokes the siblings to descend into a lengthy joint lament (1308-41).⁹⁷ This joint lament by Orestes and Electra not only ignores the gods who are present before them, a silence Castor repeatedly and without success tries to break with

97. Whitehorne (1978), 12 writes that the Dioscuri's 'ignorance becomes so painfully obvious and their pretensions to omniscience are so glaringly exposed that Orestes and Electra turn their backs on them to look for solace instead from each other'.

interjected hackneyed commentary (at 1311-3 and 1319-20), but it also swiftly returns the audience to the same uncertain place as in the previous scene prior to the Dioscuri's apparition. Though the ignored Castor even attempts to reassert his divinity in the middle of their laments at 1327-30, his failure to provide an appropriate response and the siblings' subsequent snub ultimately reveals a rather prolonged interaction with a god that results not in clarification or illumination, but rather in confusion and lack of knowledge.

As the scene draws to a close in such uncertain terms, Euripides includes another moment of reassertion by Castor as divine figure. The poet reminds us of the directorial role of the gods, as Castor, switching to the iambic trimeter, swiftly brings Orestes and Electra's lament to an end with a sudden impersonal proclamation: 'these two will tend to their marriage' (τοῖσδε μελήσει γάμος, 1343). Sighting the hounds of the furies himself (1343-6), which in previous versions were only privy to Orestes, Castor suddenly underlines his and his brother's role as *theoi soterai*:

ἀλλὰ κύνας

τάσδ' ὑποφεύγων στεῖχ' ἐπ' Ἀθηνῶν·

δεινὸν γὰρ ἵχνος βάλλουσ' ἐπὶ σοὶ

χειροδράκοντες, χρωῶτα κελαιναί,

δεινῶν ὀδυνῶν καρπὸν ἔχουσαι.

νῶ δ' ἐπὶ πόντον Σικελὸν σπουδῇ

σώσοντε νεῶν πρῶρας ἐνάλους.

διὰ δ' αἰθερίας στείχοντε πλακὸς

τοῖς μὲν μυσaroῖς οὐκ ἐπαρήγομεν,

οἷσιν δ' ὅσιον καὶ τὸ δίκαιον

φίλον ἐν βιότῳ, τούτους χαλεπῶν

ἐκλύοντες μόχθων σῶζομεν.

οὕτως ἀδικεῖν μηδεὶς θελέτω

μηδ' ἐπιόρκων μέτα συμπλείτω·
θεὸς ὦν θνητοῖς ἀγορεύω.

(E. *El.* 1343-1356)

These two will tend to their marriage. But flee these hounds
and make for Athens.

They pursue you with their terrible tracks,
serpent-armed and dark-skinned,
bearing their yield of terrible pains.

But we two shall make haste for the Sicilian sea
to rescue the prows of ships in the water.

And as we go through the ethereal plain
we do not help those who are defiled,
but rather those who hold to what is holy and just,
in their life we save and rescue from oppressive toils.

So let none willingly to do wrong,
nor sail with men who break their oaths.

Thus I, a god, speak to mortals.

Using the dual for the first time (νῶ...σώσοντε, 1347-8), Castor states their important function as saviors at sea. He works hard to emphasize his and his brothers' divinity, as if to dispel any doubts that may have arisen in the course of his conversation with his niece and nephew, and in fact ends with an emphatic declaration of his divinity: θεὸς ὦν θνητοῖς ἀγορεύω ('I, a god, speak to mortals', 1356). Yet this nervous moment of reassertion underlines the fact that the moment of salvation has been undone. Even the Dioscuri, who strictly operate in the epiphanic and thrive in moments of difficulty and crisis, have in a sense failed to bring order and closure to the House of Atreus.

Such a scene, which accentuates the twins' familial and divine obligations, becomes more extraordinary given that throughout the play Castor was not only related to Electra, but he was in fact also her betrothed:

Ηλ. ἐγημάμεσθ', ὦ ξεῖνε, θανάσιμον γάμον.

Ορ. ὥμωξ' ἀδελφὸν σόν. Μυκηναίων τίνι;

Ηλ. οὐχ ὦι πατήρ μ' ἤλπιζεν ἐκδώσειν ποτέ.

(E. *El.* 247-249)

El: I have married, stranger, into a deadly marriage.

Or: I groan for your brother. With which of the Mycenaeans?

El: Not to the one to whom my father once hoped to give me.

and

ἀνέορτος ἱερῶν καὶ χορῶν τητωμένη.

ἀναίνομαι γυναῖκας οὔσα παρθένος.

ἄισχύνομαι δὲ Κάστορ', ὅς πρὶν ἐς θεοὺς

ἐλθεῖν ἔμ' ἐμνήστευεν, οὔσαν ἐγγενῇ.

(E. *El.* 310-314)

I have no share in festive rites and am deprived of dances,

I shun the women, since I am a virgin,

and I am ashamed before Castor [and Polydeuces], who before joining the gods

courted me, their kinswoman.

In the first example, Electra makes a distinction between the lawful marriage which was approved by her father (to Castor), and her present marriage to the farmer. In the second, Electra speaks of various deprivations, including the fact that marriage to her kinsman is now impossible. To emphasize the blood connection, she uses the word ἐγγενῇ (314), which reveals the problem: Aegisthus has given her away to total stranger, abandoning father's preferences. In Athens, endogamous marriages were a way of strengthening kinship ties and

in particular consolidating the family line.⁹⁸ Electra's marriage to the farmer is thus not only demeaning to her personally but also illogical as a general strategy for the whole family. In an article addressing the 'realism' of the social and familial dynamics of *Orestes*, Mark Griffith contends that in that play Euripides has focuses our attention to various alternative 'support systems' available for the young Orestes.⁹⁹ If we consider the familial links between Castor and Electra emphasized in this play, we can see that Agamemnon had also done the same with the young Electra by attempting to secure a match with his brother-in-law. In this manner, Euripides intimately implicates Castor in the drama, establishing a variety of personal connections and affinities that potentially undermine his role as manifest deity.

The world depicted by Euripides' in his *Electra* is thus one of the most claustrophobic in extant tragedy; even the gods who manifest themselves in order to resolve the crisis are shown to be equally implicated in the deadly mortal affairs. The gods are typically summoned onto the tragic stage to solve what is humanly unsolvable. Their entrance typically heralds the eruption into the mortal world of a force that lies beyond its usual horizons.¹⁰⁰ In Euripides' *Electra*, however, a drama of interfamilial violence, everything remains in the family. The Dioscuri, whose signature activity is epiphany in moments of crisis, are shown to be unable to dispel the uncertainty created by the remorse of the matricide. This reveals a hopeless situation which remains impervious to the closure that is typically achieved by a *deus ex machina*.

Most surviving tragedy is notably centred on the sufferings of a singular *oikos* or a group of closely knit individuals, and, according to Aristotle, family conflict lies at the emotional

98. See Cox (1998), 15-37.

99. Griffith (2009), esp. 291.

100. This is famously the case in the surviving version of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, whose divine frame is precisely what distinguished it from Euripides' first version of the same play, Ἰππόλυτος Καλυπτόμενος (*Hippolytus Veiled*). The appearances by Aphrodite and Artemis transformed the play from a parable about Phaedra's lust into a clash of human will and divine power. Such divine meddling, particularly at a play's end, was criticized by Aristotle (*Po.* 1454b1-6) as external elements that do not arise from the plot itself.

heart of Greek tragedy.¹⁰¹ If we were to conceive of the tragic universe in spatial terms, operating on a two-dimensional plane, then its human dimension would occupy the wide lateral axis, a significant portion of which would consist of familial relations. In this model, the gods, as omniscient beings who dictate the terms of all action, would naturally inhabit the vertical plane. If tragedy transpires within the field of tension demarcated by these axes, however, the personal involvement of familial gods in certain plays creates moments at which the structuring principles of all tragedy, its horizontal and vertical dimensions, bend towards, and threaten to collapse into, one another.

101. Aristotle discusses familial confrontation as among the genre's most terrible (δεινὰ) and pitiable (οἰκτρὰ) incidents, identifying in particular atrocities committed by and to brothers, or between parent and child (*Po.* 1453b).

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